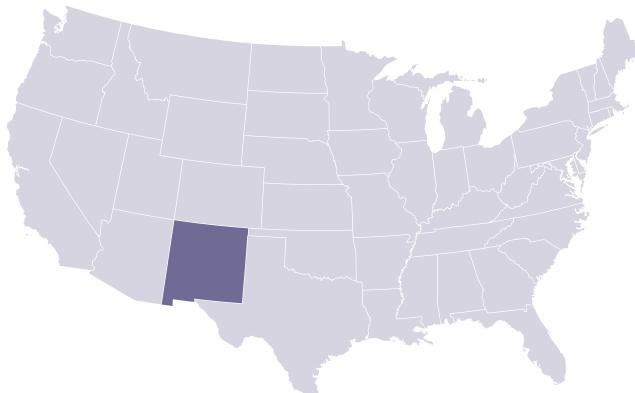




New Mexico

State Policy Brief

January 2015



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Turnaround at WestEd



<http://centeronschooldturnaround.org>

This work was supported by the Center on School Turnaround through funding from the U.S. Department of Education, PR/Award Number S283B120015. It does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

The Center on School Turnaround, a partnership of WestEd and the Academic Development Institute (ADI), the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia, and the National Implementation Research Network, is part of the federal network of fifteen Regional Comprehensive Centers,

Suggested citation for this volume:

Corbett, J. (2014). New Mexico State Policy Brief: January 2015. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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A brief prepared by Julie Corbett of Corbett Education Consulting LLC for the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd.

This brief is one in a series highlighting state policies, regulations, practices, laws, or other tools intended to create the necessary conditions for school and/or district turnaround. Each brief includes an overview of the relevant turnaround tool, its development process, its impact, and lessons learned that could assist other education agencies interested in enacting something similar. The briefs will also include relevant resources, such as the text from state codes, interviews with state education leaders, news articles, state board of education meeting minutes, bill status updates, and legislative amendments.



Policy Brief on School Turnaround – New Mexico (January 2015)

New Mexico: Principals Pursuing Excellence

I. Overview of Program

The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) launched a program in 2013, called Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE), designed to develop a cadre of strong turnaround principals. The SEA realized that a shortage of turnaround principals would dampen the state's efforts to turn around their lowest performing schools and developed the program to target that need. After one full year of implementation, the SEA's Priority Schools Bureau (PSB; New Mexico Public Education Department, <http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/PrioritySchoolsCPMP.html>) is continuing the program with a second cohort.

The PPE program is designed to “leverage the expertise of local leaders to support and empower Mentee principals, as they work urgently to dramatically improve student achievement in their schools” (NMPED, 2014a, slide 5). Mentee principals must be currently employed at schools graded C, D, or F by the state and are supported through a multilayered professional development program over the course of one year.

New Mexico has participated in the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Specialist Program (UVA-STSP) since 2010, and many of the aspects of this program were incorporated into the PPE program. One of the core features of UVA-STSP is building a set of professional skill competencies, divided into four clusters, which are indicators of a high capacity turnaround leader. The four clusters include: driving for results, influencing for results, problem solving, and showing confidence to lead (Mancuso & Petterson, n.d.). Based on New Mexico's experience with UVA-STSP, these competencies became the foundation of the PPE program.

II. Program Description

The PPE theory of action ties the capacity of principals to student achievement through an if/then logic model:

- ♦ If we strengthen the competencies of leaders to transform districts, then they will have the capacity to take bold and purposeful action.
- ♦ If leaders take bold and purposeful action, then they will establish the conditions for effective teaching and learning.
- ♦ If the conditions for effective teaching and learning are established, then teachers will have the opportunity to improve instructional practice.
- ♦ If teachers improve instructional practice, then student learning will increase (NMPED, 2014a).

The Mentee principals enter the program after completion of an application and participation in a Behavior Event Interview (BEI). The interview process is designed to evaluate an applicant's turnaround competencies and determine their capacity to turn around a school by using past examples to predict future behaviors, thoughts, actions, and beliefs (NMPED, 2014). The Mentors and Turnaround Leaders who

support the Mentee principals undergo the same process of completing an application and a BEI.¹ Once selected, the Mentees, Mentors, and Turnaround Leaders have a number of specific roles and responsibilities as part of the program. In addition, NMPED and the district also play important roles. The roles and responsibilities of the various players are listed below.

NMPED

- ◆ Establish project direction and structure
- ◆ Communicate expectation of dramatic and sustained change to all participants
- ◆ Facilitate fall, winter, and spring trainings for all participants based on turnaround research
- ◆ Document all work associated with the project for evaluation purposes (NMPED, 2014a, Slide 14)
- ◆ Recruit, screen, and select Mentee candidates
- ◆ Recruit, screen, select, and train Mentors and Turnaround Leaders
- ◆ Collaborate with Mentors, Turnaround Leaders, and district staff to align existing support, provide additional support, plan to address the needs of each district, and discuss trends across the state (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014)

Turnaround Leader

- ◆ Serves as the link between NMPED, district, Mentor, and Mentee
- ◆ Facilitates communication and differentiates supports to Mentors and Mentees to develop turnaround competencies
- ◆ Focus all roles on supporting the Mentee in creation and implementation of 90-day action plans (NMPED, 2014a, Slide 15)
- ◆ Participates in a day of training and collaboration before each two-day statewide mentee session
- ◆ Serves 2-4 Mentors

Mentor

- ◆ Collaborates with Turnaround Leader to support Mentee in creation and implementation of 90-day Plans
- ◆ Facilitates communication with NMPED, district, and Turnaround Leader
- ◆ Differentiates distance and onsite support to Mentees to develop turnaround competencies (NMPED, 2014a, Slide 16)
- ◆ Participate in a day of training and collaboration before each two-day statewide mentee session
- ◆ Serves 2-4 Mentees

¹ Additional details on the hiring process and role-specific qualifications are available in the Overview of the program and in the role-specific applications available at: <http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/PrioritySchoolsCPMP.html>.

District

- ♦ Partner with the Mentee principal to establish and deploy a comprehensive school turnaround plan
- ♦ Partner with Mentee on “critical autonomies” (such as staffing decisions, scheduling, budgeting, and other operational issues)
- ♦ Provide rigorous, aligned formative assessments and efficient data distribution
- ♦ Proactively engage the community in the turnaround effort
- ♦ Monitor turnaround efforts to ensure accountability with support of PPE Turnaround Leader and Mentor (NMPED, 2014a, Slide 17)
- ♦ Participate in professional development workshops and Professional Learning Community
- ♦ Participate in an additional day of professional development for superintendents

Mentee

- ♦ Assess school needs, design and implement effective turnaround strategies with multilayered support from Turnaround Leader, Mentor, district, and NMPED
- ♦ Receive ongoing coaching and mentoring through monthly onsite visits and frequent check-ins
- ♦ Participate in professional development workshops (several two-day sessions)² and Professional Learning Community
- ♦ Cultivate the competencies and skills of transformational leaders (NMPED, 2014a, Slide 18)
- ♦ Keep artifacts to demonstrate growth
- ♦ Must work at a school with a state accountability grade of C, D, or F³

The application also includes a letter of commitment from the district Superintendent to clarify the role of the district. NMPED requires the district to commit to supporting the principals throughout the program and strongly encourages the district to provide the principal additional autonomies or additional supports. For example, some Cohort I districts adjusted their central office structures to better support the principals, some ensured that school and district teams had sufficient time to meet, while others encouraged data-driven instruction from the top down. Many Cohort I districts initiated changes in their PPE-affiliated schools but then expanded those changes to the rest of the district as well (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014).

The coaching sessions between the Mentor and Mentee are the primary means of support to the Mentee. Coaching sessions occur, at least monthly, onsite and remotely and focus on building each individual Mentee’s competencies while also supporting the Mentee in developing the turnaround plan for the school (NMPED, 2014b; WestEd & NMPED, 2014). “The program relies in large part on the intrinsic knowledge of

² Cohort I featured three 2-day sessions and Cohort II will feature four 2-day sessions (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014).

³ Schools with grades D or F were eligible for Cohort I. Schools with grades C, D, or F were eligible for Cohort II (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014).

the turnaround leaders and mentors, supported by a curriculum based primarily on Bambrick-Santoyo's 2012 book *Leverage Leadership*, which focuses on seven core areas of school leadership" (WestEd & NMPED, 2014, p. 4). Onsite coaching sessions could include action planning, analysis of data, and classroom walkthroughs (WestEd & NMPED, 2014). Turnaround Leaders and Mentors report to PSB three times a year. The reports are used to monitor and document progress of Mentees as they implement actions and develop competencies over the course of the program (WestEd & NMPED, 2014).

In addition, "turnaround leaders and mentors [are] charged with teaching, coaching, and helping participating principals build confidence to affect change in these areas, and the 90-day action plans [track] participants' actions and progress in each of these areas throughout the [school year]. Developed after an in-depth examination of local needs, the 90-day action plan serves as the mechanism for improving the systems in place, and it is the focus of the professional dialogue between the turnaround leader, mentor, and mentee." (WestEd & NMPED, 2014, p. 5)

NMPED sponsors several two-day training sessions that provide additional professional development opportunities to the Mentees, Mentors, and Turnaround Leaders.⁴ The content for these sessions was based on the work of Public Impact (2008) and Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) and was differentiated to address the needs of the participants (WestEd & NMPED, 2014).

It is important to note that schools and districts participating in the PPE program do not receive any additional funds to support the turnaround work. The SEA covers travel costs of Mentees, but the individuals, schools, or districts do not receive additional grant funds. The Mentors and Turnaround Leaders receive an honorarium for their work supporting the districts.

III. Impact

The first PPE cohort (2013-2014) included 34 Mentee principals in 11 districts across New Mexico. The Mentees were supported by 13 Mentors and 5 Turnaround Leaders (WestEd & NMPED, 2014).

In partnership with the West Comprehensive Center,⁵ NMPED closely monitored and analyzed the impact of the PPE program. Analysis of the end-of-year reports from the Mentors and Turnaround Leaders assessed the extent to which the principals took actions and changed conditions to improve his or her school. This analysis was supplemented with the results of focus group discussions with PPE Mentee principals. Analysis of online surveys completed by teachers in each of the participating schools also assessed the changes in the schools (WestEd & NMPED, 2014).

Data analysis from the first cohort found that data-based decision making, informed instruction, and use of distributed leadership improved in the PPE schools (comparing one year of PPE participation to previous years). Teacher surveys indicated that aligning professional development and changing school culture remain areas of concern. The results of the teacher survey indicated that "participating PPE principals seemed to be taking action in their schools in 2013/14 to make changes, but they also imply that school leaders likely need to work to better involve teachers in these reforms moving forward" (WestEd & NMPED, 2014, p. 10).

⁴ There are four 2-day sessions for Cohort II (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014).

⁵ Managed by West Ed

Statewide report card grades are also used to demonstrate the impact of the program and show strong growth. After one year of participation:

- ♦ 53% of PPE schools experienced one or more grades of growth,
- ♦ 18% of PPE schools experienced two or more grades growth, and
- ♦ 3% (1 PPE school) experienced three grades of growth from an F to a B (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014).

New Mexico has several programs and intervention strategies for its lowest performing schools and districts, including the PPE program, participation in the UVA-STSP program, and the federally funded School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. As a result, NMPED has the ability to monitor the effectiveness of the various interventions, determine which strategies are most effective, and modify programs to reflect the monitoring data.

The second PPE cohort launched in September 2014 and includes 38 Mentee principals. Recruitment for this cohort targeted northern New Mexico, as there was less participation from that region in Cohort I. NMPED worked with districts to recruit multiple Mentee principals from the same district to increase the opportunity for shared learning. In addition, several superintendents who participated in the first cohort wanted to participate again but with a new group of principals (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014).

IV. Moving Implementation Forward

Based on the feedback and results from the first cohort, NMPED is scaling up for a second PPE cohort. While the first cohort consisted of 12 principals, almost 40 principals will participate in Cohort II.

NMPED also determined that the group professional development sessions would be beneficial for schools and districts receiving SIG funds. All year 4 Cohort II SIG-recipients (as part of their phase out process and continuous support) and all incoming year 1 Cohort III SIG-recipients for the 2014-15 school year will be required to attend the four two-day training sessions.

The Program Review developed by the West Comprehensive Center suggests several changes to the program for year 2, and NMPED made appropriate adjustments to respond to the recommendations, including:

- ♦ Additional (and earlier) training on improving student and staff culture at the school,
- ♦ Increased engagement with the superintendents and teacher leaders,
- ♦ Clarification of expectations and requirements for program participants (including roles, templates for reporting mechanisms, frequency of meetings, calendar/timeline),
- ♦ Providing additional training for Mentors and Turnaround Leaders before Mentees are selected, and
- ♦ Development of tools to bring consistency across the program (H. Peria, personal communication, September 15, 2014; WestEd & NMPED, 2014).

V. Lessons Learned From New Mexico

- ◆ Gather baseline data and closely monitor various interventions to make mid-course changes, compare strategies, and modify as needed.
- ◆ Recruit and screen candidates and consultants carefully to ensure high capacity from the start, even if that means starting with smaller cohorts than initially planned.
- ◆ Think carefully about sustained support—PPE is a one-year program, but principals may need additional support beyond that year to continue to build and to refine their skills.
- ◆ Ensure rigor from the onset—participants (Mentees, Mentors, and Turnaround Leaders) want high expectations. They want and need the training and the supports to achieve those expectations but thrive off increased accountability.
- ◆ Data-based decision-making cannot be separated from climate and culture. While the skills are different, the content should be taught simultaneously to link using data to changing climate and culture.
- ◆ Monitor mentee/mentor relationships carefully and make adjustments if personalities or work styles are not conducive to positive working relationships.
- ◆ Encouraging superintendent support from the onset is useful, but the real work comes down to ensuring that superintendents and district leaders actually implement changes at the district level.
- ◆ Additional grant funds do not necessarily equate to successful turnaround—New Mexico’s intervention experiences may indicate that SIG funding alone is not sufficient to turn around school. A strong leader that has support from the district and external coaching to build his or her own competencies to lead and manage a turnaround effort might be more effective than simply allocating millions of dollars to a school or district.

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